

February 9, 2011

Please support SB 116 and SB 169

Please do not support SB 167

Dear Senators,

Legalizing physician's assisted suicide may appear compassionate, but to do so would usher in unintended consequences for those vulnerable who live in our families and in our communities. To legalize their requesting suicide legalizes a decision that then becomes the standard which subtly inserts itself into the fragile balance of love and care that all human persons deserve. Permit me to explain.

My mother is in end stage Parkinson's having had the disease now for fourteen years. It is a debilitating disease that affects the lives of those who suffer from it and impacts their families as well. I remember well when my mother was first diagnosed. She lived on a remote ranch in Eastern Montana and the gravity of what she faced loomed large. We got in the car and I turned to her and said, "Mom, this is a tough one but I promise you together we'll give it our best go." And we have stood at her side. Today Mom is frozen, rarely speaks, often appears to be comatose, and her body is fully compromised and susceptible to bed sores. But Mom is not dying, Mom is chronically ill. And Mom knows what is going on around her, her eyes light up when we share with her about our families, and she loves my Father and her caregivers who are so committed to her; she never complains, rather she enjoys her life at the home where she lives, and lives to the fullest the life that is now hers.

But the pressures on us as a family are real. Within the past two weeks one family member accused my sisters and I of letting Mom live too long. My sister calmly asked him, "What would you have us do differently? We have just stood lovingly beside Mom. Would you have us do to Mom what would be done to a horse that is no longer of use? Would you have us put her down?" My sister knew he wouldn't but she knew where his frustration was coming from; it is difficult to stand beside someone as they go through deep waters that tend to swamp life's hopes. But those alternative avenues will loom large if they were legalized.

As I read SB 167 there is no question that if we open up Pandora's box this bill will be the proverbial camel's nose under the tent. Why should only the terminally ill with a diagnosis of six months to live be permitted to request assisted suicide? Why not the newly diagnosed or the chronically ill like my Mother, or the disabled, the depressed, or just those weary of living? If we don't fully protect under law the good of life, those we mistakenly sought to help will be victims of subtle pressure and what starts as

a trickle will be a flood from which they have no legal protections. Under stress family members can get frightened and confused. Furthermore, family members realizing a loss of their inheritance due to the expenses of long term health care often influence a vulnerable person's decisions. And this can be subtle and hard to detect.

We need to stand in solidarity with each other. The state has a compelling interest to protect the life of all its citizens which in turn strengthens each of us to help each other when we are in need as the end of life approaches.

Please support SB 116 and SB 169. They uphold the value of life, they protect the vulnerable. Please do not support SB 167.

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